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# UNIT 22 TOUR OPERATORS

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## 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to :

- understand the roles and functions of a tour operator,
- know about the managerial roles in tour operations,
- appreciate the skills needed to **perform** management and day-to-day tasks in a tour operator company,
- know about *caring* for customers,
- learn how to handle business correspondence, and
- learn about the monitoring and control tasks in tour operations.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 14 of **TS-1**, you were acquainted with the role of tour operator in tourism industry. A tour operator packages together a series of travel services **which** include transportation, airport transfers, accommodation, excursions and sightseeing, guide services, etc. The product which comes out after assembling all these services together is **known** as a package tour. Generally, the tour operator buys these services in **bulk** from the principal suppliers to make a package. The complete package of arrangements and **services** is then sold at an exclusive package price to clients through retail agents in the tourist-generating markets. At the same time, it must be noted that a tour operator not only **sells a package** tour but also ensures the smooth operation of **the tour**. The management **issues** in tour operations should be dealt with in the following ways:

- 1) Tasks to be performed for setting up a tour **operator** company,
- 2) Market research and product (tour package) formulation,
- 3) Selling the product, and
- 4) **Organising**, monitoring and **controlling** the **organisation's activities** as well as tour operations.

**Keeping in** view the functions of a tour operator, in this Unit we attempt to **familiarise** you with the managerial tasks involved therein. The Unit takes into account the requirements of setting up a tour operator company. It also deals with the **planning, organising** and **operational**

**Inbound - who handles** those coming into the country from overseas is called an **Inbound Tour Operator**.

**Out Bound - who operates** tours to other countries is called an **Out Bound Tour Operator**.

**Domestic - who handles** tours of people of same country for travel within the country is called a **Domestic Tour Operator**.

**Wholesaler - who plans** the tour, puts a package and markets (he tour).

**Retailer - who sells** (he tour to the **passenger**. He is **normally** (he **personal** travel agent with whom the **client** is buying other services such as tickets, **facilitation** of passports and visa, etc. The **retailer** is the **coordinator** between the **wholesaler** and the **client**.

**Inbound Tour Operators:** The **wholesaler** who **markets** (he tour **consolidates** the **members** of the group **through many retailers**. Finally the **group** thus formed is given by (he **wholesaler** as a **package** to **Inbound Operator** of that country or that **region**. The **coordination** of hotels, **transport** and other allied services is than done by the **Inbound Operator**.

**Excursion Agents - Inbound** Tour Operators **further** pass on the services of the group to **some body in the city of visit**. This somebody is **known as the Excursion agent** who in turn, **coordinates** with hotel **reservations**, **organises** **transport** and **guides** and generally, **meets** (he **needs** of the tourists in that city.

aspects necessary for tour operations. It further deals with certain minute details related to efficiency levels in your company. These are useful for training your employees as well as for those who intend taking up such jobs.

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## 22.2 SETTING UP A TOUR OPERATOR COMPANY

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Tour operator is a risky business. **This** is because a tour operator buys airline's seats, hotel rooms, etc. much in advance from the principal suppliers and if he or she fails in selling them, there are heavy losses involved. Hence, before setting up a tour operator company, one must be prepared to take this risk. Similarly, a tour operator must be absolutely clear regarding the **type** of business to be handled. For example, would the company deal with inbound tours, outbound tours, domestic tours, all of them, or any two of them, etc. This should be decided at the planning stage itself while preparing the project report (see **Unit 21**). Further **all** companies, whether large or small, must fulfill certain **minimum** requirements like :

- a proper **financial** base,
- a adequate premises,
- a trained and qualified staff,
- a government approvals, and
- a authority to sell on behalf of industry principals in return for commissions.

In Units **2, 14** and **21**, you have been acquainted with the idea of financial feasibility studies and the sources of funding. These should be co-related with the needs of a tour operator company.

Having adequate premises at a suitable location is vital for starting a new venture. The requirements of a tour operator are more or less the same as that of a travel agency. Similar is the case in relation to support services, office requirements and the travel language and terminology (see **Sec. 23.4** and **23.5** of **Unit 23**).

A tour operator has to establish linkages with the principal suppliers like airlines, hotels, tourist transport operators, guides and escorts, etc. for the purpose of designing the **package**. For this information has to be obtained. For marketing purposes, linkages have to be established with travel agents, tourism departments, etc. In fact, the **owner/manager** of a tour operator company must attain **all** knowledge about the products and market conditions. This means having a proper understanding of :

- a tourism markets,
- a tourism trends,
- tourist profiles,
- a tourism forecasts,
- a promotional strategies,
- a trade linkages,
- a travel regulations, and
- a tourism products, etc.

Besides a tour operator, after one year of operations, must seek recognition from the **Department of Tourism, Government of India** (see **Appendix 1**). In the subsequent Sections of this Unit, we will introduce you to some important issues related to tour operator's functions and the managerial tasks related to them.

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## 22.3 PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE AND PACKAGING

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In today's world of specialisation, the tour operators also package different kinds of tours and accordingly acquire product knowledge for packaging tours. We have mentioned earlier that there are inbound tour operators as well as outbound and domestic tour operators. **Within** these categories, we can further divide the tour operators in two categories:

- 1) **Mass Market Operators** are those who offer routine packages which include travel, accommodation, and some services.

- 2) Specialist Tour Operators design their **packages** keeping in view the market segmentation of the customers. For example, exclusive package tours are created for adventure tourism by some, others package wildlife tour packages or some design packages for a particular age group. Some tour operators go for geographical segmentation and operate in a specific region only. For example, certain local tour operators may **organise** tours in their catchment areas only or some may deal with business for one or two countries only. Among this category, there are also tour operators which **specialise** in using specific types of accommodation, transport and entertainment. In fact, there is no end to imagination and creativity in designing special tours after analysing the demand trends and attitudes.

Some tour operators specially design and package tours on the requests of the clients. A typical example in this regard could be the following:

A group of 15 archaeologists from U.K. intends to visit India. They want to have a feel of prominent archaeological sites and they are in the age group of 35-45. They place their requests to a travel agency in U.K. and the travel agency passes on this request to a tour operator in India. The first task for the tour operator is to assess whether such a group can be handled by the company. This may include:

- 1) The company has to get in touch with an archaeologist in India for identification of the sites to be visited.
- 2) What will be the modes of transportation to these sites?
- 3) Where accommodation has to be provided ?
- 4) Identification of a tourist guide who specialises in archaeology.
- 5) What **type** of entertainment can be provided to them in the evenings ?
- 6) What **type** of meals to be served and where ?
- 7) Where to take them for shopping, etc. ?

In fact, **after** assessing these aspects only, the tour operator will package the different components and accept the offer. The tour operator can also think of providing value addition in this package by offering a good book on archaeology to the group members, a visit to a museum where the finds from the archaeological sights are kept and shopping at a place where replicas of ancient artifacts could be bought.

**It** should be kept in mind that such requests ask for special efforts on the part of tour operator to package the tour and in the coming future the number of such **tours** is going to increase.

For the construction of any type of holiday package, market research (see Unit-16) is an essential component and once a decision is taken regarding the type of business to be done, the tour operator must take an account of the services that are to be packaged. At the same time, the tour operator must have a **first-hand** experience of the quality of the services which the principal suppliers offer, and this means field visits. In tourism, these are known as Familiarisation (FAM) Tours. Generally, these tours are at the cost of the principal suppliers who themselves are **looking** for expanding their business. Let us take the following example in this regard.

A tour operator intends to package a tour from **Delhi** to Goa. We **know** that **at least** three airlines are operating their flights on this route and there are a number of hotels in Goa. A representative of the company travels in a particular airline to assess its services. Further, he or she looks at the hotels in **Panjim** and assesses their facilities and services, location from the beach (generally people go to Goa for beach holidays) etc. The prices and commissions are also negotiated. The next thing the representative does is to deal with a local tourist transport operator for making sightseeing and excursion arrangements during the daytime and again prices and commissions are negotiated. The representative also finds out the means of entertainment **available** in the evenings and decides which one **from** among them is to be packaged in the tour.

In fact a tour operator should constantly update the knowledge about the destination in order to improve **and** redesign the package (if necessary) every year. It must be remembered that

**The airlines gives a free ticket to the tour operator and the hotel offers free hospitality.**

the packages are **generally** designed and sold **atleast** a year in advance as most of the tourists in the prominent tourist generating markets plan their holidays much in advance. This is more so necessary because of the competition in the market. In Sub-sec 23.1.1 of Unit-23, we have mentioned the types of product **knowledge** required for travel agency employees and this is equally applicable in the case of tour operators. The product knowledge has to be stored and regularly updated.

Besides product knowledge, planning, **organising**, monitoring and controls should be an in-built exercise while packaging tours. While **selling** the tours, you may face such questions as to what are your alternate or contingency plans for **meeting** the failure of any service that is offered in the package. For example, if the flight is cancelled etc. Hence, it is necessary that the **pace of operations**, contingency plans and controls **are** decided at the initial stage itself. Though, these may be for the internal consumption of your company employees.

### Check Your Progress - 1

- 1) Mention the necessary requirements for setting up a tour operator company.

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- 2) Discuss the importance of product knowledge in packaging tours.

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## 22.4 COSTING A TOUR PACKAGE

How do tour operators make money when they do a costing? The two major methods are increasing mark up and making savings through **buying** power.

### Mark Up

Our business **makes a** profit, and keeps us in employment, by handling as many clients as possible and by making sure that we make a profit on each group of clients. In order to ensure that we make a profit we must first be aware of the total cost of the ingredients of the package to our company, and we must add a mark up to that total. A mark up is the **extra** amount which our company **can** keep. If we give a quotation which is too high, because we have been too greedy with our mark up, we may lose the business to a competitor. If we do not charge enough we may not survive as an organisation. Normally the superiors make this decision about what amount to add and they usually express this as a percentage of the total cost price.

### Buying Power

We are also able to increase the amount we make on each tour group by **working** to reduce the price at which we buy the **services**. This has the effect of increasing our margin without increasing the price at which we must sell to the clients. We are in a good position to negotiate in this way when we are able to give one supplier, such as hotel, a lot of business which we

#### Example

Hotel Room net rate	900
Your Markup	200
Selling Price	<u>1100</u>

have gathered from many wholesalers, or when we are able to persuade our clients to travel at unpopular times (off season) of the year.

There are a number of other technical terms which you should know before moving on.

### Net Rate

This is the price which a supplier charges us and which he wants to be paid by us. We are free to add any amount of Mark Up to it before passing it to our client. The net rate is always kept absolutely confidential to us and the client must have no idea of the extent of the mark up. Our competitors may receive **different** net rates from the same suppliers and **will** probably add different **mark** ups.

### Gross rate

**This** is the rate which a supplier quotes **us**. It includes an amount, expressed as a percentage of the gross rate, for us. This hidden part for us is usually known as Commission. For example, if the Gross price is 10 dollars, and the commission rate is **10%**, our supplier wants to be paid 9 dollars and expects us to sell the service to the client for 10 dollars. It is probable that the same service is available elsewhere for 10 dollars and that the client is aware of this selling price. The percentage rate of the **commission** is not revealed to the client and our competitors probably receive a different commission rate even though their selling price is the same.

### Profit

It is what a company hopes to have left at the end of the year after all its bills have been paid, including taxes. Profit is not the same as mark up. However, it should be noted that many travel companies call the amount they have made on a **file** "profit on **this** file and not\*mark up on this file. This is technically incorrect but as it is common practice.

### Margin

It is much the same as mark up but whereas mark up tends to be expressed as a percentage, **margin** tends to be an amount expressed in money.

What has the client paid?

Let us imagine that a client chooses a vacation which **will** cost him **1000** US dollars. (Round figures have been used for convenience in this example)

Total amount received by retail client	1000
Retail agents commission on this sale	100
Amount passed to wholesaler	100
Wholesalers mark <b>up/profit</b> on file	100
<b>Airseat</b> to destination	400
Amount of inbound operators invoice to wholesaler	400

Can you see that your invoice of \$ 400 to the wholesaler has had many other things added to it before the client finally gets his **bill** ? All of these figures are kept confidential to the travel trade. Clients are **well** aware that everyone is making money, but they are never permitted to know the exact details.

We **will** now look at your part of the work, which is how you arrive at the amount you must invoice your wholesaler.

### Obtaining the Rates to use in a Costing

**The** most simple way to obtain the rate you **will** be **charged** for a particular service is to ask the supplier. You could telephone a **hotel**, ask for a net agent's rate, or a commissionable **gross** rate, and simply work from there. If you deal only very rarely with a supplier then this is what you **will** probably have to do. (You must always **confirm** the conversation in writing **afterwards** and take the reference of the person who gave the rate.)

This is the easiest way to get a rate, but it will not be the best price available. Most tour companies go to great lengths to negotiate favourable special terms with suppliers they use **frequently** and so you are **likely** to find that in your office there is a list of rates which your **company is charged by these good partners. It may be held on a paper file, or in a computer.**

There should be such a list to cover **all** the services **you use** frequently such as hotels, guides, transport, sightseeing entrance fees, meals at **restaurants** during tours, **equipment** hire etc. You should look carefully to see whether the rates are NET or GROSS to your company. Remember what these terms mean. Sometimes, your suppliers will publish their rates in a document **called** a "Confidential tariff". Be careful to establish whether the rates are net or gross. If you have a large group you may be able to improve on the published rate by negotiation. Note that the document in which your company's rates are published to your wholesalers may also be called a confidential tariff but of course that document includes your company's mark up.

#### **How to Reduce Costs?**

Sometimes, you **will** cost a tour and find that the selling price is too high for your client. What can you do in this case? It is not always possible to cut the margin, or try to negotiate a lower buying price. You can try a **number** of other alternatives:

- reduce the number of nights,
- reduce the included meal plan,
- reduce the included sightseeing or activities, or
- use a cheaper hotel, etc.

**All** of these **will** have the effect of reducing the gross cost to your client (but they will also reduce your profit on this file). When you take an action to reduce the cost by reducing the quality you must **be** sure to explain clearly to the client why the tour is now less expensive. If **you** do this carefully, you may even persuade them to pay the higher price for a better product.

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## **22.5 PREPARING VOUCHERS**

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Vouchers (sometimes called exchange orders) are documents which are issued by travel businesses. They serve instead of endless letters and can be used to :

- make reservations,
- confirm reservations, and
- guarantee payment.

Instead of writing a lengthy booking letter, sending a deposit cheque or cash, then writing a confirmation letter and **sending** another cheque, or more cash, a voucher can be written. This saves time, effort and removes the risks of escorts and other staff carrying large amounts of cash. Because vouchers are promises to pay, they are Accountable documents and must be treated **like** tickets or cash. That is, they must be carefully secured and stock controlled. Vouchers can be used for a wide variety of services. Typically, these will include :

- Hotel **bookings**,
- Meal breaks on tours,
- Transport,
- Guide and representatives,
- Entrance fees to attractions,
- Tolls for roads, bridges or mountain passes,
- Hire of equipment for sports and activities and many more.

Vouchers are usually printed in sets of four or more copies and the **distribution** of the copies is as follows :

- 1) An office's client file copy,
- 2) Client's copy which he or she presents to hotel (or other service) on arrival,
- 3) Hotel's copy, goes in advance of client to act as confirmation of phone **booking**,
- 4) Accounts department's copy,
- 5) Some companies have a use for a **fifth** or more copies.

To sum up, a voucher is a promise to pay for a service someone promises to provide. In order to do this a voucher must be:

- a Accurate,
- a Brief, and
- a Clear.

## Issuing Vouchers

When you issue a voucher, you should keep a record of the voucher number and the client file it belongs to in a stock record book as well as keeping a copy of the voucher in the accounts and clients files. Some companies work on photocopied vouchers. These are cheap and easy to produce but have the disadvantage that they are easy to copy and so are open to fraud. Some modern computer reservations and **ticketing systems** can print and number, their own vouchers which is less open to fraud, and cheaper than going to an outside printer.

## Issuing Vouchers Accurately and Fully

In **issuing** vouchers all you have to do is to complete each box fully and completely. If you are able to type the entries then you should do so. It looks much better, and is easier to read. If you must hand write a voucher then you should use block capitals and indelible ink or ball-point. Always check that all copies have come out clearly, especially if using **carbon** paper. Let us look at one example of a correctly completed voucher for a transfer, which you are asking your partner agency. Coconut Travel, to conduct on your behalf.

Remember that we said a voucher was a **document which outlined a promise to provide a service**. In **writing** the following voucher in detail we are advising our partner exactly what we have done and we are giving enough information to allow them to do it properly. They have all the flight details, the family name is underlined so they can address the passengers politely, and they know that there is a special need concerning a wheelchair which may mean that the representative has to be a little stronger **than** usual, a little more sympathetic, and the car must be able to accommodate the folded chair. Lastly, as the passengers are English **speaking**, **they** will choose a representative who **can** communicate with them. Similar vouchers are made for hotels or other service providers also.

EXCHANGE ORDER				No. 017364	
<b>To M/S. SPECIAL TOURIST TRAVELS</b> <b>26, ROAYPETTAH HIGH ROAD</b> <b>MADRAS.</b>  <b>ATTN: INBOUND RESERVATIONS DEPT.</b>		<b>Our File Ref.</b> <b>ABC/432</b>  <b>Issuing Office</b> <b>YOUR OFFICE</b> <b>ADDRESS</b> <b>Date By</b> <b>TODAY YOUR</b> <b>NAME</b>		<b>Archaeological Tours Pvt. Ltd.</b> <b>12, Nehru Place</b> <b>New Delhi.</b>	
<b>SERVICES</b>  <b>TO BE</b>  <b>PROVIDED</b>	<b>Pax Name</b> <b>MR / S.M.HENRY</b>			<b>Basis</b> <b>ARRIVAL</b> <b>TRANSFER</b> <b>ONLY</b>	
	<b>From MADRAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</b>	<b>To</b> <b>HOTEL TAJ</b>	<b>No. Nights</b> <b>N/A</b>		
<b>Details</b>	<b>UNIFORMED MEET/GREET ARRIVAL TRANSFER 02 PAX + BAGS EX BA 123</b> <b>ARR MAA 15,000 28 APR, 96</b>  <b>PRIVATE AIRCONDITIONED CAR</b> <b>NOTE MRS .HENRY USES OWN WHEELCHAIR. SPECIAL ASSITANCE</b> <b>REQUIRED, PASSENGERS ARE ENGLISH SPEAKING.</b>				
<b>In exchange for this order, please provide passengers listed hereon with services detailed.</b> <b>Any additional charges are to be billed direct to guests and collected by your company at the time of service.</b>					

**Note that only very rarely do prices ever appear on vouchers. This is** because there is a difference between the net rate that we are paying and the gross rate that **the** client is paying. We keep these rates, and the extent of the difference, **confidential**.

## Amendments and Alterations

Amended or altered vouchers which you are considering accepting should be viewed with suspicion for the same reasons. However, there may be a good reason why they have been amended. For example, if 20 lunches have been booked, but a guide arrives with only 18 people, she would rightly expect to amend the voucher for 20 to 18 by hand. However, if she amended the voucher from 20 lunches to 20 full board you might wish to check for the issuing office before accepting the alteration. Take **careful** note of the sentences printed at the very bottom of the voucher which are for everyone's protection.

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## 22.6 CARING FOR CUSTOMERS

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For tour operators to be successful and earn money, they must provide a quality service. If an operator does not do this **he/she** will find it **difficult** to attract customers. There is **fierce** competition **between** inbound operators to get and keep clients. Only those who really provide good customer care have a hope of surviving.

### 1) Providing a Quality Service

Your clients have high expectations of the service you **can** provide. For these expectations to be met depends largely on how good you are at your job. You can either make their dreams come true or turn their dreams into nightmares. Unless you **can** satisfy these expectations customers will be unhappy. On the other hand, if you **can** give a better service than they expected you will have gone far beyond their hopes and expectations. Remember that many clients may **be** experienced travellers who will judge your service against their previous experiences. Trying to please every customer is not only done to make them happy but to **get** repeat business and good publicity. Caring for your clients and ensuring they enjoy a **high** quality service is **all** about putting people first. The reason for checking a ticket delivered by an airline before giving it to your customers is to give them the best service. To offer a quality service to every client:

- means being able to maintain **high** standards and repeat them every time, and
- involves developing systems and **making them** work every time.

Always remember that every client likes to feel special. Making each one feel different from thousands of others you deal with every year is not always easy. Here are a few simple **ways** to achieve this:

- always acknowledge people when you meet them,
- look them in the eye when you speak,
- **smile** - and mean it,
- address people courteously, and
- use their name if you know it.

**Liking** all customers is not easy either as there will be some people you instantly like, while there **will** be some people you instantly dislike. This is not wrong as it is after all a natural human reaction. But it is wrong to let your dislike show.

### 2) Giving a Little Bit Extra

"When I went to the tour operator to book my snorkeling trip, he asked me if I preferred a mask with or without side windows and he also checked whether I had any previous experience. When I said I had none he offered a free introduction in the swimming pool so that I would **be** comfortable at once on the real reef. He made me feel really relaxed when I had felt a little nervous. That was really helpful."

"My tour operator tried to sell me insurance, travellers cheques, visa application and collection, hotels at the other end and even a chauffeur driven taxi service to get me to **the** airport. He should know by now that I travel a lot and have all these things **under control**. I felt he was trying to make extra sales at **my** expense." Guess which client felt they **were** getting good service. These examples **highlight** the key factor in giving quality service - its

Whether you are an owner, manager, supervisor or an employee all your efforts should be geared towards providing quality service.



the caring way the service is delivered that makes success. The idea of giving that little bit extra is really what good customer care is all about. You **should** put the client's interests first.

In your job you **will** be shown a whole series **of** tasks to do and be encouraged to do all of them well each and every time. You would easily start to focus on doing the job to please your senior, and forget that the reason for doing the job is to look after your client. To give them the best possible standard of care and service is the reason for doing all the different tasks that are part of your job.

Sometimes you **should** ask yourself "Why am I doing this?" If you **can** arrive at an answer that puts the client first then you have understood correctly. But if your answer is "Because the boss says that is what to do" you are not focused on the customer and are likely to do just the minimum to scrape by. So 'giving that little bit extra means **thinking** of your customers' reaction to your work, and trying to look after their comfort and satisfaction.

With experience you **will** learn what the customer expects from you. The secret in giving that little bit extra is anticipating the request before it comes, being prepared to deal with it and even perhaps offering it before it is asked for.

### 3) Handling Client Complaints

There **will** be times when things do not quite go right. You need to be ready to deal with them. Clients or wholesalers may sometimes bring a problem to your attention, without being upset about it. It is really a request for additional help. Once **that** help is given the issue is closed. These are often small incidents. They may also result from a client having slightly different needs from most others. A simple adjustment or extra service solves the problem. It can even be turned into an example of extra caring, extra attentive service. You can earn extra goodwill by removing these **kinds** of problems. On the other hand a **customer/wholesaler** complaint is a **problem** that they really feel upset about. This is where the issue gets complicated. You **will** have to deal with two quite separate things:

- firstly you will have to deal with feelings and emotions,
- secondly you will also have to deal with the problem.

Anger and criticism are like fire, they spread rapidly and **can** quickly get out of control. By **following** these guidelines you contain the anger, get it under control **and** stop it spreading. You **will** also have to deal with feelings and emotions. **Do not take the complaint seriously, even when you think it is exaggerated or unreasonable. This will let your client know that you are prepared to listen and help.** It may start calming them **down** right away. You should also take certain other steps:

- Do stay calm yourself. This allows you to stay in control. When **you** are calm and your client angry the observers are likely to suppose you are right.
- Do keep your speech and tone businesslike.
- Do try not to take the complaint personally. If you do so you **will** become emotionally involved too, the situation **will** get worse because you will start to defend yourself or argue back.
- Never argue or answer back. If the complaint does, however, centre on you bring in a **colleague** or manager as a witness.
- **Any** problem has to be dealt tactfully. You **should** take the person somewhere private as loud voices attract attention and anger can be contagious. Get the person sit down as people often become less aggressive when seated. Listen all the way through the **complaint** and often the clients **will** talk themselves out of their anger. **Ask** questions to get the full details and you can show understanding but must not offer your own opinion on the issues. Here comments like "I see," "I understand," "Do go on" suggest that you can see the **person's problem** but they do not **commit** you to agreeing with them.
- Make note of important points. **Repeat them back** to the client so you both agree you have all the facts. Alternatively, you can **ask the client** to write out the report. This in itself can be a cooling **down tactic**. Find out exactly what the person **wants**.
- Agree on a solution. This is possible where you **can** manage to solve **the problem**. If you need time to investigate the complaint or to **consult** other **people**, **undertake** to report back with an answer or a solution.

**In case you are a manager or a supervisor you must ensure that your employees use these Ups for handling client complaints.**

- Follow up as you said you would. The correct handling of complaints does not end here. You **will** have to investigate the facts as told to you. There is possibly another version of the story. You should also decide on a solution and then report back with a solution to the **client/wholesaler**. Nor does the matter end here. You need to secure agreement from the client that the matter is now closed. Make a note of the incident and its final solution in the complaints or incident book.
- You should know when to say "sorry" and when not to say it. Be very **careful** about saying sorry. If you say it before you have found out the whole story and before you know if there is really a fault, you in effect accept responsibility. The client can take your apology as your accepting responsibility and then expect compensation. The client could even use it in a legal battle if things went that far. You can say that you are sorry that there appears to be a problem. This does not suggest that you accept the fault is yours. You can say sorry if after investigation the fault was yours and you **intend** to make amends.
- Complaints made in writing **are** often more serious than complaints made face to face. People put complaints in writing when they want some form of compensation (often in terms of money back) or are thinking about taking legal action. You must deal with written complaints immediately. Reply immediately in writing to say you have received their complaint and are investigating the problem. Undertake to keep them informed of your action. Investigate the problem. Decide on the best action. Inform the unhappy client in writing. Keep all correspondence and notes on file.
- Monitor all complaints and problems. By keeping a record of all the incidents that happen you **will** be able to see trends and patterns. This allows you to put the matter right at the source and could stop it happening again.

**These aspects are relevant not only in the case of a tour operator company but also in a travel agency, airline and hotels etc.**

#### Check Your Progress - 2

- 1) What all should you consider while costing a tour package ?

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- 2) Why should you provide a quality service ?

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## 22.7 BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

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Many of the wholesalers of your operation will require confirmations or tickets sent to them by mail, and many of the documents **about** your clients **will** arrive in your **office** by mail. All organisations **depend** on **incoming**, outgoing and **internal** correspondence. The product of

tour operators is an arrangement made on paper and we depend on the mail more than many other businesses. Correspondence **can** be by:

- letter
- fax
- telex
- memo
- E-mail

The "mail" here includes the public post office system or it could also include a messenger boy and national or international courier service. There are many reasons why we correspond with others and these **can** include:

- requesting information,
- giving information,
- sales promotion (mail shots),
- receiving documents,
- despatching documents,
- receiving payments, and
- despatching payments, etc.

**All incoming correspondence must be handled quickly and correctly in order that customers' bookings are properly processed and all outgoing correspondence should create a professional image of both yourself and your company.**

#### i) Incoming correspondence

One of the first tasks of the working day is to deal with all correspondence. **This** may mean that someone has to go through the post received, someone has to check the fax **machine**, collect printouts **from** the telex machine, **and write** down messages from the **answer-phone**, **and someone** has to check the computers for E-mail or **networked** messages.

In order to do this that "someone" needs to be free of the need to **sell** to new customers. Most operators **will** put the staff on a rota whereby they take their turn on administration or **counter** duties.

Incoming correspondence **can** cover many different subjects. It may include updates from suppliers on products available, invoices for services provided, requests from customers, arrival of tickets, new stocks of brochures, advice of flight time changes, customer complaints, and much more. It will be important to deal with all of this information in order of priority. You can start by

- opening **all** of the company correspondence,
- checking the name of the addressee, and
- recording the date received (using a date stamp).

You will now have quite a pile of mail in front of you. Where to **begin**? Well, you should **sort** the post according to **urgency**. **Remember, existing client business is the most urgent.**

Messages which have arrived by answer-phone, telex, fax or E-mail are usually, but not always, more urgent than those which have come by post, so you should put these in one pile for the most **urgent** attention. Next you should look for letters which deal with very urgent matters, such as invoices, receipts, tickets or time changes.

After these come **requests which may lead to new business**. Enquiries from prospective clients need close attention. Then comes matters to do with **general office administration**, such as bank statements, bills for the office rent, etc. If you do not handle these promptly you will have a business but no premises. Next, there is likely to be quite a lot of product information, such as new editions of timetables, a trade newspaper, or the office copy of a new brochure. You certainly need to keep these but they are less urgent. Last **will** come circulars, and effort by other businesses to sell to us. If you are on post duties your job is to

**All aspects of Business Correspondence are relevant for Travel agency, tour operators, hotels, etc.**

read the mail quickly, establish the level of priority, and deliver it promptly to its **next** destination in the company. **This** could be to a colleague, to a file, or even directly to the waste paper bin. Your own office will have a system for dealing with specific documents. The system may not be like that of any other company and so training material like this cannot tell you how to operate it. What you need to remember is that:

- existing business comes first,
- potential business comes second,
- administration comes third, and
- product updates comes next.

**Customer complaints are existing business and will not go away if you put them at the bottom of the pile.** All incoming mail must be distributed in the first-half hour of the working day so that it can be dealt with promptly.

## ii) Outgoing Correspondence

What came in, has to go back out, so before long your office will be replying to all the messages you received in the early morning. Corresponding with people is an opportunity to transmit a professional image of **yourself** and your company and therefore it must all look smart as well as be correct.

Before you send any correspondence from your office you **should** check that :

- the correct paper is used (letterhead, etc.)
- the letter is formatted correctly,
- it has the correct-date,
- it is addressed to the correct person,
- all information is correct (double check with **all** files)
- there are no grammatical, spelling, or typing errors,
- all questions asked have been answered,
- the letter is easily understood,
- the letter **is** polite and businesslike,
- the letter has been signed by the appropriate person,
- the envelope has been addressed correctly, the postage is **fixed** and sufficient, and
- the correspondence is despatched by the most appropriate means according to its urgency.

## iii) Mailing and Postage

Mailing procedures will vary from company to company. However, here are some general rules that should be applied :

- use regular mail if the correspondence will reach its destination as quickly as airmail. (Regular mail costs less.).
- speed is essential with all travel related correspondence. Use air mail when the correspondence will reach the addressee sooner than surface mail.
- use **couriers/office** boys **for** urgent local deliveries.
- use registered mail when the correspondence being sent, warrants a record of delivery (eg. valueables such as tickets). If using office boys give them a book to obtain signatures in exchange for deliveries made.
- always ensure that the correct and full **address** is on the envelope.
- use fax, E-Mail or telex in place of mail if speed is essential. Send a copy by mail if necessary.
- It is your responsibility to make sure that the correct amount of postage has been included on the letter. The amount of postage will be **determined** by the:
  - destination of the **correspondence**,
  - type of **mail service** selected (regular, airmail, **etc.**), and
  - **weight of the correspondence**.

The Central Post Office in each country issues a national and international tariff **for** various countries, mail **services** and weights of correspondence. You must be familiar with these **tariffs**.

The correct postage **can** be assessed at any Post Office. Postal Weighing Scales are available whereby the weight of the correspondence **can** be assessed and the correct postage calculated. If such equipment is in use in your office you must know how to calculate the correct amount of postage. Some larger agencies **will** use mail **Franking machines** to cover postage. The **Franking** machine **will** automatically stamp the letter with the required amount of postage and record the amount covered.

#### iv) internal Correspondence

Corresponding with other members of staff **will** be part of the daily routine in any company. This is normally done in an informal way. Handwritten notes are normally quite acceptable when communicating with your colleagues. When you have passed on an important or urgent piece of information to a colleague you should double check that it was received. A quick verbal "Did you see my note about Mr **Ali's** flight cancellation?" takes only a moment. If you are required to write a detailed report it **should** always be typed, even if only for internal use. You should use a typewriter, word processor or a computer to ensure that the finished item looks professional.

#### v) Despatching Correspondence

At the end of the **working** day there could be a large/quantity of mail to send. This will include **electronic** despatch as well as physical posting. If **everything** is left to the last minute the **person** who should send the mail will want to go home and the mail will sit until tomorrow. Not very professional. **The whole office staff should therefore be aware of what time the mail will leave from the office, and ideally this will be about an hour or half an hour before the close of business.** At this time the administration person **will** collect the mail, and take it to the box or post office. This may take a little time so it will be that person's last duty of the day. Faxes, telexes, etc. should not await the end of the day but should be despatched at once throughout the working day.

## 22.8 BRIEFINGS

For the success of tour operations, the company must properly brief the escorts, tour guides and drivers.

### 22.8.1 Briefing the Escort/Tour Guide

A professional **escort/tour** guide knows all about the history, flora and fauna, etc. of his day **tour**. He has studied hard and probably has something close to a script which he has learned and which he says to every group. But if he is truly professional he **will** want to give of his best and he will try to avoid a "patter". After all, he knows a lot more than he ever has time to say so we should help him to tailor his information to the needs of our group. How do we do this? We tell him:

- **How many people are in the group?**
- **What language the people speak?** We **also** tell him whether it is their native tongue or whether they are just about coping because there was no available guide who could speak their native tongue.
- **How old the group members are?** If the **escort/tour** guide knows that he has a lot of very elderly people abroad he may decide to cut out a steep climb up a hill to a viewpoint and to make that stretch of the journey by road. Equally, if the group contains a lot of children, he may spend longer at an attraction they would enjoy (elephant bath) and less time at something which may bore them (politician's birthplace). The actual itinerary is not being changed, just the emphasis.
- **What else other parts of the itinerary includes?** Clients who are having a different sightseeing tour each day do not want to hear the same explanation each morning from different guides! Give the guide an opportunity to show his wider knowledge. "I know that you have seen tea growing when you were in Sri **Lanka**. Do you know how we drink

**Escorted Tours - This is an organised and planned tour in which a tour escort serves the group or individual by accompanying throughout the tour.**

**Unescorted Tours - Though organised and planned, in this tour there is no escort accompanying the tour. Instead the group or individual is taken care of at every destination by Tour Host/Excursion Agent whose services have been taken for that particular destination.**

it here in **India**"; or "Today we **will** visit a Buddhist **temple**, which differs from what you have seen at .. in that.."

- Special interests: Some groups have special interests, and even expertise in things. A little research **will** allow you to offer an extra on your tour. For example a group of nurses may wish to visit a hospital, or, if not, they may well ask detailed questions about what health w e is available and how people pay for it. A man who you know to be a heavy smoker may like to stop at a tobacco plantation, a keen horse rider **will** want to watch a few minutes of a polo match you might have driven past. Older people may have been to your country before and may want to relive special memories. A little research **will** allow the guide to say "yes, that building was the British **Club**", or "that is the place where the battle of .. was fought." Very often these small things make a "nice" day tour into a "fabulous" day tour for your clients and they cost you nothing.
- If there are VIPs on the tour: Of course, every client should be treated as if they were a VIP. But it is a fact that you **will** need to treat some people more specially still ! If you know that you have travel agents, or a member of your wholesalers staff on the tour, make sure that the guide takes extra w e of them to preserve your reputation.
- Special requests: Some clients have special needs and **special** requests which are very important to them. These could be something like a special diet. You would advise the lunch stop of this on the voucher but the **escort/guide** should ensure that the request is actioned at lunch time. Equally, a Moslem group may want to stop at a mosque at prayer times and a simple reorganisation of the itinerary could help. Some people may have health or mobility problems which need consideration.
- Today's itinerary: When briefing the **escort/tour** guide as above you must also make sure that you go through all fixed points of the day. For example, the briefing should include:
  - "You have to be at the Hotel for lunch at **12:00**. If you are late you **will** clash with our other group and the hotel would not be able to manage. or,
  - "You have a morning coffee at 10 (clients own expense, no voucher), lunch at 12, (voucher), elephant ride at 2, (vouchers not accepted so please sign the receipt for this cash, and bring a copy of their receipt, tea break at **3:30** (voucher). Then the clients are free for shopping but you must not let them be too long as they have a **formal** dinner in the hotel at 7 and will need time to change." A written itinerary, containing all this and with vouchers attached will help the guide enormously.

### 22.8.2 Briefing the Driver

The vehicle and driver are vital parts of the tour, before meeting the tourists the driver should have checked :

- fuel
- Water
- Engine Oil
- Tyres
- Tyre Pressure
- Q Spare wheel at correct pressure
- Brakes
- Jack and tools
- Windscreen wipers
- Lights
- Horn
- Ventilation/heating/cooling
- Public address
- Microphone
- First aid kit

- Windows
- a Paintwork
- a Seats
- Floor
- Ashtrays
- a Refreshments, etc.

The driver **himself** should be well briefed. Often, he will have been to the places before, and knows the best way. If he is new he needs careful help before starting off. The driver's appearance is also important. He should :

- a be neatly and cleanly dressed, fresh and clean,
- a he should not smoke, spit, or chew betel abroad the vehicle, and
- a he should not **drink** alcohol during the tour, or come to work smelling of it.

## 22.83 Feedback

You should always be looking for feedback from your clients. This may come as casual comment from them to you or to the guide, or you may ask for it more formally by means of a questionnaire.

### Positive Feedback

It is always a pleasure to receive it but you should listen to it actively. It may be telling you **something** more as well. "**This** guide's English was so clear", with the stress on "This" may be telling you that others are **not** clear enough. If you are very alert you can constantly check quality and ensure the satisfaction of your visitors.

### Negative Feedback

This should also be carefully attended to. "We did not enjoy the visit to the temple because it **was so** hot". What **can** you do about the weather ? Nothing. But on future tours you could cool the people down by :

- a visiting early in the morning
- a ending parasols for shade
- a combining the visit with a refreshment break
- a making sure the bus is waiting with its air conditioning **on** (and not parked in the sun with its engine **off** !)
- a advising the people in advance so that they will prepare themselves.

### Check Your Progress-3

1) Why is it necessary to handle business correspondence in a professional way ?

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2) What kind of briefing should be given to **Escorts/Tour** Guides?

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## 22.9 ORGANISING PICKUP, TRANSFERS, AND HOTEL CHECK IN

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For some weeks, or even months, your office has been working to obtain the business from, and conduct administration for, a group of clients. These clients are now about to arrive and you have to make all your service promises come true. This is the moment to **fulfill** expectations and to prove that your company, and your **country/destination** were the right choices for their vacation.

**A good impression, made right at the start of the visit, will put everyone in the right mood towards an overall success. Conversely, problems at this stage will simply persuade the clients that the whole thing was a mistake and they will be difficult to deal with for the rest of their stay.** This could mean that they are likely to make complaints over small matters, and it could mean that they will refuse to buy the extra services which contribute to your company's financial success. Proper preparation and well conducted transfers will ensure this all important smooth start.

### **Put Yourself in the Client's Shoes**

Clients arriving from a long flight will be tired. They may also be dehydrated (as a result of ~~the~~ physical effects of flying, and of drinking alcohol on the flight which exaggerates this effect). They may be suffering from the change of climate from their country to yours. (A Northern European coming to South Asia in January could be experiencing a difference of as much as 45 to 50 degrees C which takes a little adjustment). They are often nervous, so let us consider what of. First, there is a fear of a foreign culture, foreign food, foreign people of different races and colours, of getting lost, ill, or **robbed**, and who knows what others fears ! Of course, these fears can also be looked at in a more positive way and be regarded as part of the challenge, and the excitement, of travelling abroad. After all our clients did choose to come to us ! But when you arrive at a strange, noisy and hot airport, and must cope with the bureaucracy and rudeness of many immigration and customs officials, the delay for your luggage, and the inadequacy of the trolleys, and when you have been travelling for many hours, it is not always easy to be positive.

What do clients want at this stage ? They want to regain those things that they lost when they set off from their own country. We can summarise their personal needs as to :

- feel safe and secure,
- satisfy physical needs,
- have intellectual stimulation,
- belong with others, and
- have their status recognised.

**Everything we do before, during, or after their transfer is designed to fulfill these needs.** We should also consider whether our clients actually need us to conduct this transfer for them ? He does not ! Most adults are capable of finding their way to wherever they have to go. It may take them longer, especially if there are language problems, and it may be less comfortable, more expensive, and slower to do it themselves, but they do not actually need us. So why do they employ us ? We are employed to arrange transfers because we can do them more cheaply, more quickly, more comfortably, than they can themselves, and we **can** <sup>also</sup> provide for all



those personal needs we listed above. If we are not able to manage all this we should not be **arranging** transfers as we are useless. Clients will soon **realise** this and **our** business **will** evaporate. Now let us look at what steps we can take to ensure that **all goes** well and the clients needs are met. In fact, several days before pre-arrival day you should check :

- That transport has been booked. This should be the right kind of vehicle for the purpose. (Did you know that in some parts of the world horses, **camels**, bullock carts, rickshaws, boats, helicopters, seaplanes are used for transfers, not just the usual cars and buses ?)
- Check that you are using the most appropriate transport for your clients. Clients may have requested air conditioning or they may have a lot of luggage so that a larger vehicle, or even a second vehicle specially for the bags **will** be needed. (this particularly applies to active special interest groups like divers, climbers, trekkers, campers).
- The transport must have been selected because it is reliable, safe, well maintained and clean. The driver must be briefed as to exactly where the transport should be in relation to the terminal building and how you can locate it when the group is ready, Ensure that the transport company knows the number of passengers and bags expected and the ETA of the flight and its number. Double check that there **will** be a proper seat for every guest. Remember to leave one for the transfer personnel.
- A **voucher will** be needed for the transport and should be prepared.
- If there is to be payment of **portage of luggage** then the representative must have cash to pay porters and a **money receipt** for them to sign.
- Check that hotel rooms will be available on arrival and advise the hotel front office what time the clients are likely to be actually in the hotel so that the housekeeping department is ready for them (this is especially important in the case of very early or very late arrivals.) Remember the clients needs.
- Check reservations against the hotels rooming list to ensure correct number, configuration and for any special requests (cots, low floor, sea view etc.)
- Check that the **hotel voucher** has been issued and that the rate agreed is correct.
- Ensure that the following are prepared for the person who is going to conduct the transfer:
  - Flight number
  - **Namelist**
  - Details of transport, transport voucher
  - Hotel name and address, rooming list and hotel voucher
  - Together with any special details such as the nature of the group, difficulties with mobility, VIPs etc.
  - **Greeting/sign** board (see bellow)

**STA: Scheduled Time of arrival**

**ETA: Expected Time of Arrival**

**ATA: Actual Time of Arrival**

(In some cities where there is a long transfer between airport and city there is a representative who meets at the airport and then despatches the group to the hotel where another representative awaits. In this case **each of them must have an identical briefing**, but, of course, only one has the transport voucher and one has the hotel voucher. They must also each be aware who the other is and how to make contact when the group is under way. Mobile phones are of great use in this.)

## On Arrival Day

The meet and greet process starts before you set off for the airport. There is no point in going there unless your flight is coming in so you should call the airline and establish the Actual time **of arrival**. This can be **accurately** given only after the **aircraft has** actually left its departure point. Do not be persuaded to **accept** the scheduled time of arrival which **can** be wildly different. **If there is a substantial change to the timings be sure to advise the transport company and the hotel of changes.** Early arrivals generally cause more panic than late ones. You must be at the airport before the passengers **can** possibly be out of the customs hall. Experience will tell you **how** long it takes for passengers to appear out of the customs hall at your airport after the aircraft has landed. If you are able to have an **airside pass** then you should be in the customs hall assisting and greeting passengers. In some airports this is not

allowed **because** of security concerns and in **this case** you must position yourself **immediately outside** the customs **hall**.

### **Prepare Yourself**

- Remember that **you never get a second chance to make a first impression**. Your appearance at the airport **should** thus be highly professional.
- You should be clean, neat, and very well groomed.
- You should be wearing a badge which identifies you as the official in charge of your clients (it reassures that you are not just any old local, you are the right professional.)
- Your clothes should be immaculate in terms of being clean, pressed, and in good repair. If you can wear a uniform **this** is ideal as it also helps you to be easily **recognised** and trusted.
- **If** you have a choice of clothing **then** think what being "well dressed" means. It means that you should be wearing something which is suitable for the job **in** hand.

In some parts of South **Asia** an airport **representative** would be very suitably dressed if wearing a sari, or for men a shirt and tie, in company **colours**. However, in other areas, where a **small** boat transfer direct to a resort beach is involved, **this** would be highly impractical. In **this case** shorts for men, or a simple **cotton** skirt for **ladies**, may be suitable, worn with a neat tee shirt bearing the company name and logo. The colour of your clothes is important as you should be easy to **recognise**. At any airport in the region you **can** see hundreds of people wearing similar clothes. Try to be different and tell your wholesalers how to describe you to clients ("our ladies wear emerald green like your baggage labels" is easy to spot and to remember).

### **What Other Equipment do you Need?**

At the airport, you need to have the following ready for use :

- badge,
- uniform on you,
- greeting board,
- namelist,
- clipboard and pen,
- mobile phone or phonecard or coins,
- tips or voucher for porters,
- transport voucher,
- hotel voucher,
- welcome **packs and/or gifts**,
- hotel registration cards, and
- your smile.

### **When you identify your passengers?**

Greet them **cheerfully**, and briefly welcome them, and tick them off on your list (security and **status** for them). **Ask** them to wait in the place you have chosen to assemble your group while you gather up others. If you find that you have **missed** someone **ask** the airport information service to announce :

- name of **missing** passenger, .
- name of tour group, .
- place arrived from,
- easily identifiable meeting point, and
- ensure this **announcement is in the** language the passenger **speaks**.

On rare occasions the passenger does not appear. Check with the airline that they are in fact on board the flight. If not, there is no need to wait. If **so**, then repeat the public announcement

and **leave** a written note at the information point **giving** advice to the **passenger** about how to catch up with the group. Wait a total of 30 minutes and then continue with the transfer. At all stages keep the other passengers advised of the reason for the delay. (This reassures them that you are doing a careful job.)

### Lost or Damaged Baggage

Passengers should have reported lost or damaged baggage in the **customs/baggage** areas where the forms for **tracing/replacing** the bags **can** be obtained from the airline staff. This is where your **airside** pass could have helped. Reassure the passengers, who feel very threatened by **this** situation and may become very **upset**, and go back with them to complete the necessary forms. Make sure that the airline gives the passenger copies of **all** forms filled in and that these are carefully kept by the clients as they **will** be required for insurance. The airlines are responsible for finding and forwarding lost bags and fixed rates of compensation are payable to help with the cost of toiletries, and other essentials when bags are lost or delayed. Offer to go with the client for **this** essential shopping.

### Leaving the Clients Alone and Signposting

If at any time you have to leave clients to attend to another matter you should always "signpost". This means that you do not just disappear but you explain where you are going and why. Failure to do **this** leads to insecurity amongst the clients. Examples could be "please stay here I am going to check on the coach" or "I will be back in 10 minutes I am going to help with that damaged **bag**".

When you have all the passengers, and all their **bags** are accounted for, you should lead the group to the vehicle holding the welcome notice high so that they **can** follow you through a crowd. Go steadily, so that all **can** keep up, and talk to the passengers in a welcoming manner about their journey etc. Take care when crossing roads. Before boarding the vehicle **ensure** that each person checks that his own bags have been loaded. The loading will usually be done by porters or the driver but they cannot be expected to know whose bags are whose. Before **moving** off welcome the group again, saying your name clearly and **checking** the number of passengers present is still correct.

### Arriving at the Hotel

Introduce the driver, say again the name of the hotel and tell the group the approximate driving time to get there. During the transfer give some basic information such as :

- The local time now,
- Explain the **local** currency and where money **can** be changed,
- **Weather/climate**, and
- Explain the next event on their programme.

Avoid the temptation to **talk non** stop for your clients are tired. However, you could **give** some general information about the route, if you have time. If the transfer is long enough, the group is large and if the hotel has been helpful in **this** matter, you may be able to give out hotel registration cards, **and** even room keys on the transfer. This **saves the** long wait and queues in the lobby. The best hotels are keen to ensure that the delay is minimal, and that a large group does not clutter up their lobby for too long. If you have done **this** then you must give the completed cards to reception on arrival. If you do not have the keys the clients **can** give the cards to exchange for a key. If you have room numbers you should take your list to the porters and ask clients to identify their bags. You **can** chalk the **room** number on the bags and the delivery process can start. Good porters **will** obviously do **all this** for themselves, but a **tactful**, gentle, "**training**" from you will speed **everything** up for your guests in a less well **organised** hotel.

**Now** your clients are on their way to their rooms, but your job is still not over. You should ensure that you have a copy of the rooming list with room numbers on it, and you should wait for about 15 minutes from when the last clients arrived in their rooms. If there are any complaints ("we did not get the sea view we paid for," or, "**there** is no **cot** for **ow** baby") **this** is when they **will** be most easily resolved. After this time, if **all** is still quiet, you **can** go. Here is a **checklist** to help you to remember **all** this.

## Arrival Transfer Checklist

- Check rooming list with hotel
- a Call airline for ETA
- a Be in good time
- a Check whereabouts of vehicle
- a Be in best position with nameboard
- a Go **airside** if possible
- a Rendezvous with clients
- a Smile
- Help with porters and tip same
- a Ensure all **pax** and bags present before moving off
- a Signpost if leaving clients
- a Install clients in vehicle
- a Smile, repeat welcome
- a State journey time and mileage
- Comment on route
- Start tour selling process
- State next item on programme
- Collect airtickets for reconfirmation of onward sector
- If time, handout registration cards and **keys**
- On arrival go ahead to reception
- Activate porters
- See all clients to rooms (smile)
- Wait till all is quiet
- **Depart**

## Departure Transfers

The departing experience of a client is crucial for your company's image. Departure transfer for your clients is to be handled very professionally. Like the arrival transfer it starts some days beforehand. Within 72 hours after arrival all scheduled seats for the next sector should be **reconfirmed**. This means that you should have gathered up all the tickets and done this for your clients. BEWARE. There are just a few **airlines** which have different requirements such as "reconfirm within 72 hours of departure" and failure to comply can lose clients their seats. Get to know your local situation. You are supposed to be the professional.

Each and every client must be advised in writing one day before of their flight time and date and pickup time from the hotel. This can be achieved by putting a notice on the tour notice board, or you **can** leave a letter for each client with reception. (If **you** do not put this in writing there is a risk that a client who misses the flight can blame you.) Details of any departure tax payable should be included. Once again, you need to reconfirm transport and voucher arrangements with the transport company and double check that there is no change to the flight time. You need to establish how long before departure clients should **pay** their extra bills at reception. Computerised hotels can usually cope just before departure unless the group is very large, but some properties prefer this to be done and right before.

On departure day follow the departure transfer checklist given below which is essentially the same as for the arrival transfer. Remember that the customers' needs are the same. He or she may again be nervous and unsure but has now come to trust you and should be easier to direct.

## Missing Passengers

Very occasionally you **will** have a passenger who does not appear for the departure transfer. You should call his room check the hotel restaurant or pool areas and ask the hotel staff and

your other guests if they know where he can be. If **all** this fails, to locate him you should leave a message in writing for him at reception **telling** him how to catch up with the group and get to the airport.

On arrival at the airport you should tell the airline that you are missing one person so that they can be prepared to help with a late and flustered passenger. If the client is an adult there is no need for you to be concerned with the consequences of overstaying visas or missing flights **PROVIDED** that you have done everything to ensure he was told what he ought to be doing. (and that you can prove what you did.)

### Departure Transfer Checklist

- Brief clients in writing and in advance
- Brief hotel and porters to be ready
- Be at hotel early
- Ask reception if everyone has paid extras
- Gather up clients, phone rooms of those who do not appear
- Load bags (Each client to confirm)
- Remind clients:
  - to pay extras
  - to return keys
  - to empty safe deposits
  - to have passports and tickets in hand luggage
- a Load passengers
- a Depart for airport
- On route explain procedure at airport
- Explain what facilities there are **airside** (toilets ? post office ? duty-free ? bar ? care ?)
- a Drive as close as possible to check in area
- Before **leaving** bus wish them a safe and happy journey home and that they will come back soon. **Sound** as if you mean it.
- At saying goodbye some passengers may offer small tips and gifts. Thank for these but **NEVER solicit them.**
- Assist with getting **porters/trolleys**
- a Assist with check in **procedures/airport** tax paying etc.
- Escort to security and passport control
- When all have gone **airside** you can leave but not before
- If there is a delay before the clients have **gone airside** you are still responsible for them.

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## 22.10 OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

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Tourism is a very sensitive industry as it deals with people and their holidays. We have already mentioned in the preceding sections various aspects necessary for making the customer feel comfortable. However, certain other aspects **should** also be taken into account.

- 1) A tour operator company must manage its finances well and you must take into account the issues mentioned in **Units 14, 18, 19, 20, & 21.**
- 2) A tour operator, besides having proper product knowledge, must also have a proper **understanding** about the functioning and role of each organisation (like airline, hotel, surface transport, **Govt.** departments **such** as Archaeological Survey, Ministry of Environment, etc.). He or she should also **analyse the** options available and work out contingency plans.

**It is advisable that tour operators sign contracts with their principal suppliers as well as clients regarding the services, damages to be claimed, area of jurisdiction in case of legal cases, etc. The tour operators must consult their lawyers and representative body in this regard**

- 3) The manager as well as the employees in a tour operator company should always be prepared to react to any sudden development (strikes, health problems, political upheaval, **non-availability** of hotels or airline seats, etc.). In such situations, on the spot decision making is required to offer solutions.
- 4) Increasing use of technology has considerably changed the nature of operations management. However, computers, fax machines and even telephone systems also keep breaking down (**e.g.** power cuts etc.). Hence, it is important that the company should also train the employees in manual system as it **comes** handy in times of crisis.
- 5) Market research, market segmentation, understanding the tourist markets, tourist profiles, etc. are essential for achieving success in business and a tour operator must pay considerable attention on these aspects. Besides, proper linkages have to be established with principal suppliers. Preparing attractive brochures, participation in travel fairs and travel conventions help the tour operator in increasing business. Many tour operators are also going for direct selling to the consumers by putting advertisements in the print as well as electronic media.

#### Check Your Progress - 4

- 1) How as a manager would you instruct your employee to receive a group of tourists at the airport?

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- 2) What steps would you initiate regarding the departure of a tourist group ?

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## 22.11 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have **familiarised** you with certain details regarding the **management and** day-to-day functions in a tour operator company. It is essential for a tour operator to first gain knowledge about the market conditions and then acquire product knowledge. The Unit also dealt with certain aspects like preparing vouchers, caring for customers, business correspondence, briefings, etc. which at the surface may appear to you as something trivial but you must remember that these are **all** vital issues as far as customer satisfaction is concerned and cannot be taken lightly in a service industry like tourism. These are equally important for managers, supervisory staff as well as employees. You should also once again read Unit **No.14** of **TS-1**.

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## 22.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress-1

- 1) These requirements have been **dealt with** in **Sec.22.2**.
- 2) You **can** package a tour only after attaining product knowledge. See Sec.22.3.

### Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See **Sec.22.4**
- 2) In a competitive situation, you **can** survive only by providing quality service to your customers or else you may lose your business.

### Check Your Progress-3

- 1) In Sec.22.7, we have mentioned how to handle **business** correspondence **in a professional** way. Such an exercise increases the reputation of your company, tells the client that you mean business and would handle everything as per their satisfaction.
- 2) The work of the tour operator does not end by packaging and selling tours but a tour operator has to also ensure a smooth functioning of the tour. Hence, it is necessary to give proper briefings to all concerned. In Sub-sec.22.8.1, we have discussed the **briefings** to be given to the **escorts/tour** guides.

### Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Read the relevant **paragraphs** in **Sec.22.9** for your answer.
- 2) The way you welcome a group on arrival, in the same way you have to take care about **departures** also. The first impression is always important but equally important is the last **impression** which you are giving at the time of departure. Read the relevant paragraphs in **Sec.22.9** for your answers.

## APPENDIX-1

Department of Tourism, Government of India

### RULES FOR RECOGNITION AS APPROVED TOUR OPERATOR **WITH EFFECT** FROM 64.1992

- 1) The aims and objectives of the scheme for recognition shall be to promote tourism in India. This is a voluntary scheme open to all **bonafide** tour operators.
- 2) Definition: A Tour Operator Organisation is one which makes arrangements for transport, accommodation, sightseeing, entertainment and other tourism related services for tourists.
- 3) **All** applications for recognition shall be addressed to the Director General of Tourism, Transport Bhawan, No. 1, Parliament Street, New **Delhi** - 110 001.
- 4) The following conditions must be fulfilled by the Tour Operator for grant of recognition by Department of Tourism:
  - i) The application for grant of recognition shall be in the prescribed form.
  - ii) The Tour Operator should have a minimum paid-up capital of Rs. 1.00 **lakh** duly supported by the latest audited balance **sheet/Chartered** Accountant's **certificate**.
  - iii) The turn-over in terms of foreign exchange or Indian rupees by the **firm** from tour operation only should be a minimum of Rs. 5.00 **lakhs** duly supported by Chartered Accountant's certificate.
  - iv) The Tour Operator has an office under the charge of a full time member of their staff, who is adequately **trained/experienced** in matters regarding transport, accommodation, currency, customs regulations and general information about travel and tourism related services.
  - v) The Tour Operator should have been in operation for a minimum period of one year **before** the date of application.
  - vi) The Tour Operator will have to be income tax **assessee** and should have filed Income Tax return for the current assessment year.
- 5) The recognition as Approved Tour Operator once granted shall continue unless withdrawn subject to their continuance in this business and their submitting the requisite annual return of Income Tax and other particulars.
- 6) The Tour Operator will be required to pay a non-refundable one time fee of Rs. **1,000/-** while applying for the recognition. The fee will be made payable to the Pay and Accounts Officer, Department of Tourism in the form of a Bank Draft. The fee **for** recognition of each Branch Office will be Rs. 500/-.
- 7) Recognition will be granted to the Headquarters Office of Tour Operators, Branch Offices will be approved along with the Headquarters Office or subsequently, provided the particulars of the Branch **Offices** are submitted to Department of Tourism and accepted by it.
- 8) The decision of the Department of Tourism, Government of India, in the matter of recognition shall be final. The Government of India may, in their discretion, refuse to **recognise** any **firm** or withdraw/withhold at any time recognition already granted without assigning any reason.
- 9) Tour Operator granted recognition shall be **entitled to** such incentives and concessions as may be granted by Government from time to time and shall abide by the terms and conditions of recognition as prescribed from time to time by the Department of Tourism, Government of India.



- 1) Name and address of Head Office and Branch Offices.
- 2) Nature of the firm and the year when the firm was registered or commenced business, with documentary proof.
- 3) Name of **Directors/Partners**, etc. The details of their interests, if any, in other business may also be indicated.
- 4) Give particulars of staff employed, their qualifications, experience, salary and length of **service** with the firm.
- 5) Name of Bankers (Please attach a reference from your bankers).
- 6) Name of Auditors. A balance-sheet and Profit and Loss statement pertaining to tour operation business, as prescribed under Company Law, must be submitted **by** each applicant. These audited statements should be in respect of your establishment for the last completed financial year or **for** the calendar year immediately preceding the date of submission of your application. Also furnish details of **your** turnover in the following statement:

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**Name and particulars of the Tour Operator concerned**

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| a) Paid up capital                   | f) Fixed assets (excluding intangible assets) |
| b) <b>Loans</b>                      | g) Investment                                 |
| i) Secured                           | h) Current Assets                             |
| ii) Unsecured                        |   |
| c) Reserves                          | i) Intangible assets                          |
| d) Current Liabilities and provision |   |
| e) Total _____                       | j) Total _____                                |
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**NOTES:**

- i) Reserves should include balance of Profit and Loss **Account** and would exclude taxation reserve.
- ii) Current liabilities and provisions **would** include taxation reserve.
- iii) Currents assets would include sundry debts, loans and advances, cash and bank balance.
- iv) Intangible assets would include goodwill, preliminary expenses, tenancy and business rights, deferred revenue expenditure, accumulated loss, etc.
- 7) Copy of acknowledgement certificate in respect of Income Tax return for the current assessment year should be enclosed.
- 8) Whether any other **activities are** undertaken by the firm besides Tour Operation.
- 9) Member of **International Travel Organisations**.
- 10)
  - a) Give details of volume of tourist traffic handles **upto** the date of application showing foreign and **international** tourist traffic separately. Please submit a certificate from Chartered Accountant. This certificate should show the receipts from tour operation only during the **financial year** or the calendar year immediately preceding the date of submission of **your** application.
  - b) Clientable: Special tourist groups handled, if any, their size, frequency, etc.
  - c) Steps taken to promote domestic tourist **traffic** and details of the groups handled, if any.
  - d) Special programmes, if any, arranged for foreign tourists.

- 11) Number of Conferences handled, if any, and the total number of passengers for such Conferences with details of locations, etc.
- 12) Number of incentive tours handled.
- 13) Please enclose a Demand Draft of Rs. 1,000/- for Head **Office** and Rs. 500/- for each Branch **Office** as fee for recognition and mention the D.D. No., date and amount in this **column**.

**Signature of Prop./Partner/Managing Director**

Rubber Stamp of the firm.